

# Character Builder 您好學? 呀

The basic unit of the Chinese language is the *zi* (字), i.e. a Chinese word. Each *zi* has a written form (called a character, made up of strokes), a sound (made up of consonant and vowel) and a meaning (or multiple meanings). When we speak or write Chinese, we string *zi* together to form terms, phrases and sentences.

In Putonghua (the spoken form of Modern Standard Chinese) each *zi* is pronounced in one of four tones:

1<sup>st</sup> tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged

2<sup>nd</sup> tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high

3<sup>rd</sup> tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high

4<sup>th</sup> tone: 4 = diacritical mark \ pitch: 5 to 1, highest to lowest

To pronounce each *zi* below, follow its pinyin and the given tone number. Light-sound words, which have no definite pitch, carry no diacritical mark and are marked by 0.

This week: Words about eyes

Putonghua pronunciation: *yan3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *ngaan5*

Meaning: eye, hole, opening, aperture

眼 (radical 目 *mu4*, eye) = 眼睛 (*yan3 jing1* = eye's-pupil = eyes), 看一眼 (*kan4 yi1 yan3* = see/look-one-eye) = take a look. 掉眼淚 (*diao4 yan3 lei4* = drop-eyes'-tears) = cry/weep.

眼 = hole/aperture: 針眼 (*zhen1 yan3* = needle's-eye), 泉眼 (*quan2 yan3* = spring's-source), 天眼 (*tian1 yan3* = sky-eye = CCTV-camera). 錢眼 (*qian2 yan3* = money/coin's-eye) is hole on ancient coin. However, 見錢開眼 (*jian4 qian2 kai1 yan3* = see- money-open-eyes) means pleased at/yielding to the sight of money. 好眼力 (*hao3 yan3 li4* = good-eye-strength/power) describes person with good observation/judgment. Cantonese expression “冇眼睇” (Cantonese pronunciation “*mou2 ngaan5 tai2* = no-eye-see) means I give up, don't want to see this!”)

by Diana Yue